Fall 2013 (1137)

GSWS 205-3: Women and Popular Culture

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Lecture: Mondays 14:30 – 17:20;

Course Description:
Facebook measures popularity by counting how many “Friends” we have and how often they “Like” what we say, yet what we say might just be an attempt to reject “the popular” – a sneer at Justin Bieber and his pet monkey, let’s say. Clearly, popularity can be regarded as a good thing, a bad thing, something to pursue, or something against which to define oneself. In this class, we will endeavour to avoid the pitfalls of either rejecting or exalting texts by virtue of their popularity. Instead, we will learn ways to understand popular texts in all of their ambiguity, mixed messaging, subtlety, and undeveloped potential. Students should expect to participate vigorously in classroom discussions and activities.

Through our watching of ten (mostly Hollywood-produced) films of recent decades, we will ask: how have popular representations of gender changed from the 1980s to today? Is popular culture a place of innovation for gender or merely the depoliticized and corporatized afterlife of truly unusual disruptions to the gendered status quo? Can we conceive of differential gender treatment as itself a matter of aesthetic popularity? Are “freak” genders merely “unpopular” rather than in any way deficient? What is a bromance, a slut, a teenager, a hero, a villain, a bitch, a stud, a hipster, a psychopath, a freak, and a pervert? At a time when thorough gender-focused interpretation of texts is often construed as “reading too much into it,” how can we expand our notion of “enjoyment” to include intellectual and creative activity?

Learning Outcomes:
- developed capacity for critical engagement of popular culture, gender, and sexuality
- improved ability to define, articulate, and advance a unique response to cultural texts
- increased curiosity and creativity as a reader, writer, speaker, and maker of culture

Course Texts and Courseware:
- Readings distributed online
- Films:
  1. Avatar (I, A), $19.99
  2. The Birds (I, A, C, R)
  3. Boys Don’t Cry (I, A, R)
  4. The Breakfast Club (I, A, C, R)
  6. The Silence of the Lambs (I, A, R)
  7. Mean Girls (I, A, C, R)
  8. We Need to Talk About Kevin (I, A, R)
  9. Melancholia (I, A, R)
  10. Y Tu Mama Tambien (I, A, R)

I=iTunes, C=Chapters, A=Amazon, N=Netflix, R=Rent on iTunes

Notes on Locating the Films:
Eight of the ten films are available for rent for under $5 on iTunes. If a student rents those films and buys the remaining two, the total cost of materials for this course will be $67. (Students who plan weekly screening parties can reduce the cost further.) In addition, the Vancouver Public Library has many copies of each film. Copies will be made available at the university bookstore, though I recommend that you pursue the much more economical iTunes option. Feel free to use other sources, or to watch the films in whatever edition and language you choose. (Classes and evaluations will each refer to the English editions.)

My best advice is to start gathering/downloading the films as soon as possible.

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
- Participation 15%
- Mid-Term 20%
- Paper 25%
- Pop Culture Creation Project 15%
- Final Exam 25%

THE DEPARTMENT OF GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND WOMEN’S STUDIES ENCOURAGES CLARITY OF THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION AND GOOD WRITING.
STUDENTS WILL BE EVALUATED ON THESE SKILLS IN ALL COURSES GIVEN BY THE DEPARTMENT.
IN ADDITION, THE DEPARTMENT WILL FOLLOW POLICY T10.02 WITH RESPECT TO "INTELLECTUAL HONESTY," AND "ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE" (WWW.SFU.CA/POlicies/TeACHING)
Description of Assignments:

**Participation** – Graded based on the quality and regularity of a student’s participation in class discussions, attendance and attention, short in-class writing responses, informal group presentations, etc.

**Mid-Term** – An in-class written assessment of a student’s ability to identify, understand, contextualize, apply, critique, and extend the ideas discussed in the first half of the course.

**Paper** – A written assignment (length to be determined) that will exhibit the student’s capacity for research, critical engagement, and the development of a unique argument.

**Pop Culture Creation Project** – A student’s chance to intervene in the ideas and genres studied throughout the term. Eligible genres are likely to include performances, short video, writing for pop publications, etc.

**Final Exam** – A cumulative written evaluation with an emphasis on key concepts and the student’s ability to synthesize and expand upon the course’s overarching themes.